



Informed Demand for Safe Motherhood

The MNH Program designs communication strategies that empower individuals and communities to seek and expect high-quality maternal and newborn health services.

Informed demand results when community members are motivated and empowered to seek services, guided by what they know.

People use health services most effectively when they know what services they need and how to get them. Healthcare programs aimed at promoting use of services should therefore focus on increasing community members' understanding of the value of different services, of the availability of services, and of how to access services. Informed demand results when community members are motivated and empowered to seek services, guided by what they know. As active participants in their own healthcare, community members can also help shape the supply of these services.

In the Maternal and Neonatal Health (MNH) Program and other safe motherhood programs, the goal of creating informed demand is to increase community understanding and appropriate, efficient use of healthcare services during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. This approach reinforces the concept of community-driven quality, as the demand for high-quality services is defined by the community's knowledge and expectations.

Generating Informed Demand

The MNH Program works to generate informed demand based on two key principles:

- As active participants in their healthcare, not passive recipients of messages, women, their families, and their communities are entitled to full and accurate information.
- As empowered participants in their healthcare, women, families, and communities expect more of the services they receive and the providers that offer them.

Program communication designed to generate informed demand therefore should educate individuals and groups about what needs to be done, what can be done, whom to consult, when, and what to expect. It should also motivate these

individuals and groups to seek care accordingly. Thus, communication strategies aim to increase knowledge, improve understanding, and empower individuals and groups.

Increasing Knowledge

Creating better-informed users typically involves increasing their knowledge through the mass media, community events, and interpersonal communication with volunteer and professional healthcare workers. Safe motherhood communication activities aim to increase knowledge and confidence areas related to seeking skilled care during pregnancy and childbirth:

- Knowing **when to seek care** increases timely decision-making. For instance, knowing when to seek care encourages family and community members to seek care early and to find skilled care as early as possible in the event of a complication.
- Knowing **where to go for care** is also an integral component of informed demand for safe motherhood. Depending on the setting, this may simply mean knowing where to find skilled care in a village, or it might mean knowing which services are provided at each level of the health system, so less time is spent reaching the appropriate level of care.
- Knowing **how to reach care** means that family and community members know which local resources are available, and how to access them to reach care efficiently.
- Knowing **whom to consult** involves understanding the qualifications and skills of each available cadre of provider and consulting the one having the skills needed to save lives.
- Knowing **what to expect** from a healthcare provider or at a facility means that family and community members know their rights as users,

understand the constraints of the provider and facility, and feel empowered to request adequate services, information, and treatment.

The MNH Program's activities to generate informed demand in **Zambia** and **Indonesia** rely on radio programming to share best clinical practices during pregnancy, childbirth, and the newborn/postpartum period with the general public. This same information is given to providers. The aim is to make the information widely available and to help increase the knowledge base among potential users of maternal and neonatal health services, so they are better prepared to talk meaningfully with healthcare workers.

Improving Understanding

Accurate information alone does not create informed demand. People are more likely to accept new information if they understand it, understand their options, and understand possible benefits and consequences. In **Guatemala**, community members are developing life-saving plans by coming together to understand what happens in their communities during obstetric emergencies and what the barriers are to seeking, reaching, and receiving emergency obstetric care. Together, they are increasing participation in establishing or utilizing emergency networks. They identify life-threatening complications and the appropriate healthcare sites to treat them, and they locate and map community resources needed to reach care.

Many of the life-saving plans include funding schemes that cover the costs of transportation and medicine. By developing life-saving plans, individuals and communities improve their understanding of the importance of going quickly to the appropriate healthcare site, the resources needed to get there, and how to obtain these resources in their communities.

Empowering Individuals and Groups

Finally, informed demand occurs only when individuals and communities feel empowered—when they possess the inner confidence and certitude to speak out, to act, and to make changes. In many countries, women feel that complications during childbirth are “their lot.” Others, embarrassed to be pregnant, hide their condition and do not talk about it until they are having labor pains or suffering complications. In many settings, people feel mistreated by providers, feel that they are not allowed to ask questions, or feel that they cannot expect an answer. Informed demand cannot occur in such situations.

The MNH Program is addressing these issues in several countries. For example, in **Nepal**, the Program has contributed to a comprehensive communication strategy that focuses on the difficult reality of women's lower status, and encourages women to not feel embarrassed or ashamed about their pregnancy, but rather to talk about and prepare for it. Husbands and mothers-in-law are key partners in this process, and are intended audiences for the communication strategy.

The MNH Program in **Guatemala** is generating informed demand for maternal health services through a performance and quality improvement initiative in which community members, healthcare staff, providers, and managers are critical components. This initiative addresses service quality from the perspectives of the provider, the client, and the community. It is intended to increase consensus about what constitutes high-quality care and to shape the client's and community's expectations of that care. Participatory techniques have been used to elicit and discuss realistic expectations of provider performance, health facility performance, and client responsibilities. Criteria were negotiated and agreed upon, using facilitated dialogue among the stakeholders. These expectations were then shaped into performance criteria for the facilities, as part of a process of accreditation. Because criteria were commonly defined and agreed to, all stakeholders feel responsible to implement them and empowered to monitor their application.

Support for Program Planners

The MNH Program believes that birth preparedness and complication readiness at all levels can contribute to reducing the delays that kill mothers and newborns, and to increasing the use of life-saving actions such as ensuring the presence of a skilled provider during childbirth. One of the MNH Program's resources, *Birth Preparedness and Complication Readiness: A Matrix of Shared Responsibility*, outlines the key actions, practices, and services that women, families, and communities can undertake to be prepared for birth and to be ready in the case of complications. The matrix serves as a guide for program planners and managers as they design communication strategies to generate informed demand and plan for the resulting service delivery needs. In building informed demand, program managers must constantly gauge clinical capacity and responsiveness so as to avoid generating demand out of pace with supply.

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Program visit our
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